



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

TODD P. GRAVES

Contact Don Ledford, Public Affairs • (816) 426-4220 • 400 East Ninth Street, Room 5510 • Kansas City, MO 64106

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow

APRIL 15, 2005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OPERATION ICE PALACE **TWO PLEAD GUILTY TO METH-RELATED CHARGES**

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that two defendants have pleaded guilty in federal court this week to charges related to a conspiracy to distribute ingredients used to manufacture methamphetamine.

These guilty pleas are the result of Operation Ice Palace, a long-term investigation into the illegal sale of large quantities of over-the-counter cold medications to methamphetamine manufacturers in southwest Missouri. Operation Ice Palace resulted in a series of indictments by a federal grand jury against 53 defendants.

Tracy J. VanBibber, 39, of Camdenton, Mo., pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge James C. England this morning to distributing pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **VanBibber** was an employee of County Corner Convenience Store in Sunrise Beach, Mo., in August 2002, when she sold a total of 360 pseudoephedrine pills to an undercover officer with the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

Gabriel Delossantos, 29, of Rogers, Ark., pleaded guilty on April 14, 2005, to his role in the conspiracy to distribute pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **Delossantos** admitted that in October 2002 he had an agreement with others to obtain pseudoephedrine in order to provide it to individuals to manufacture methamphetamine. On Oct. 16, 2002, **Delossantos** purchased 2,568 pills of 30-milligram dosage pseudoephedrine, which he intended to distribute to others to make methamphetamine.

On June 4, 2004, co-defendant **Charles Laffoon**, 64, of Harrison, Ark., pleaded guilty to his role in the conspiracy to distribute pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **Laffoon** was a sales agent for Handi-Rak, a convenience store supply company located in Springfield, Mo., from January 2001 until November 2003.

Beginning in August 2001, Graves said, the owner of the Sims General Store in rural McDonald County, Mo., Sherry Woodard, a convicted defendant in a separate but related case resulting from Operation Ice Palace, began to order excessive amounts of generic pseudoephedrine products. Those amounts were greatly above that which the store had previously ordered, Graves said, and could not be explained by the store's location. **Laffoon** observed Woodard place the pseudoephedrine in a back room of the store after delivery, but never observed Woodard selling any of the pseudoephedrine, or placing the pseudoephedrine on shelves, in the store itself.

Woodard, 45, of Washburn, Mo., was sentenced on Jan. 21, 2005, to 10 years in federal prison without parole after being convicted by a federal jury for her role in a methamphetamine conspiracy that resulted in the manufacture and distribution of between 1.5 and 5 kilograms of methamphetamine.

Laffoon had reasonable cause to believe, based on the excessive sales to the store and the storage of the pseudoephedrine in the back of the store, that Woodard was diverting the pseudoephedrine to the manufacture of methamphetamine. Despite this, Graves said, **Laffoon** continued to sell Woodard large amounts of pseudoephedrine until the end of January 2002, and only stopped selling the pseudoephedrine after the execution of a state search warrant at the Sims Store. The total amount of generic pseudoephedrine sold by **Laffoon** to the store was 2.5 kilograms.

Under federal statutes, each of these defendants could be subject to a sentence of up to 20 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000. A sentencing hearing for **Laffoon** is scheduled for May 3, 2005. Sentencing hearings for **VanBibber** and **Delossantos** will be scheduled after the completion of presentence investigations by the United States Probation Office.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. Operation Ice Palace was investigated by the Internal Revenue Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, COMET (the Combined Ozarks Multi-jurisdictional Enforcement Team), the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Greene County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Lawrence County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Ozark County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Arkansas State Police, and the Springfield, Mo., Police Department.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow